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Giving All Students High-Quality Teachers

When No Child Left Behind became law in 2001, one provision stated that all students would have highly qualified teachers by 2006. States still haven't met the U.S. Department of Education mandate—yet progress has been made. So, what are schools doing to ensure that teachers have the credentials and knowledge to effectively teach students?

Even by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards, the highly qualified teacher (HQT) mandate is an ambitious goal. The legislation requires that 100 percent of all teachers involved in teaching core academic subjects (even in chronically underserved schools) be considered "highly qualified" in their field. And, while the original 2006 deadline and the revised 2007 deadline have come and gone without attaining the goal, states have slowly reduced the percentage of teachers who do not meet the standard.

Seeking Equity

The HQT provision of NCLB requires states to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects (English, language arts, reading, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography) demonstrate their expertise with

- (1) A bachelor's or higher degree in the subject taught.
- (2) Full teacher certification at the state level.
- (3) Demonstrated knowledge in the subjects taught.

One of the main goals of the HQT mandate is to ensure that underperforming schools or those in high-poverty areas have good, knowledgeable teachers.

States need to have "a plan with specific steps to ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at disproportional rates by teachers who are unqualified, out of field, or inexperienced," said Robert Stonehill in a 2006 webcast cosponsored by

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the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and the U.S. Department of Education. Stonehill, then deputy director for Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs in the U.S. Department of Education, and other federal education staff provided state education officials guidance on fulfilling the highly qualified teachers mandate in NCLB.

Schools in high-poverty urban districts tend to have the highest numbers

of inexperienced teachers and rates of turnover, noted Elizabeth Witt, the U.S. Department of Education's team leader for Teacher Quality Programs, during the webcast. Often, it is poor working conditions that drive teachers out, she remarked.

"We know from the research that salary is not always the main issue for these teachers. A lot of times, what really concerns them are the issues in their school," such as a lack of collaborative prep time, rundown buildings, and issues of safety, Witt said.

Some states are providing student loan forgiveness or financial incentives for teachers willing to work in hard-to-staff schools. Other programs provide intensive induction and mentoring of new teachers to give them the training and tools to cope in a tough school environment.

Another focal point of the NCLB legislation is getting states to devise more rigorous standards to determine whether veteran teachers are truly highly qualified. Subject-area competency can already be demonstrated in different ways depending on whether a teacher is new to the profession or

teaching in rural areas, where teachers must teach several subjects to various grade levels. For more experienced teachers, who may have successfully taught a subject for years without a degree in it, alternative assessments such as National Board certification and portfolios may be used. Federal funds allocated to state agencies under the HQT's Title II provision (and in some cases, Title I provisions to help at-risk schools) are used to pay for tuition, testing fees, stipends, and other professional development to help teachers attain HQT status.

Supporting New Jersey's Teachers

To fulfill NCLB's mandate for 100 percent highly qualified teachers, states are acting on the plans they submitted to federal education authorities in 2006 and 2007. These plans include data-gathering measures and analyses to identify schools and districts lacking highly qualified teachers. The plans also outline what actions school districts are taking to help teachers attain HQT status and explain how state programs will support the districts in these efforts. U.S. Department of Education officials are also making visits to state agencies to monitor progress and compliance throughout 2008.

New Jersey was one of the first states to have its HQT plans approved by the U.S. Department of Education, and the state has steadily increased the number of highly qualified teachers through a combination of programs, including federally funded programs for training in specific subject areas such as world languages, science, and math. Also, the state's high-needs school districts offer ongoing school-based professional development, organized by grade level and subject area—a concept already aligned with research showing the positive impacts professional learning communities have on teaching and learning.

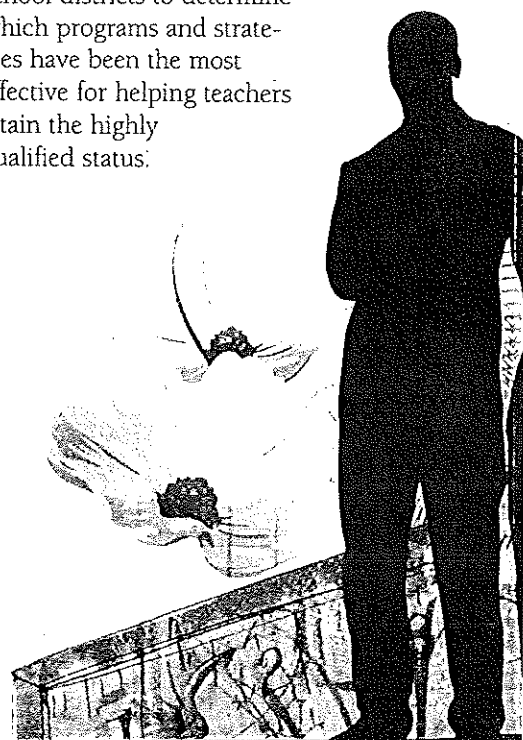
"We believe that through collaborative professional development teachers will

feel more supported and empowered and more effective. As a result, many will be more likely to stay in the profession and move to attain the highly qualified credential," says Carol Albritton, teacher quality coordinator for the New Jersey Department of Education.

In the 2006–07 school year, New Jersey reported that 1.2 percent of its classes had teachers who did not meet the NCLB mandate—a significant drop from 6.5 percent in 2004–05. The corresponding change in high-poverty schools for the same period was even more dramatic—from 13.7 percent to 2.6 percent. The latest figures would indicate that New Jersey is closing the equity gap; at the state's most affluent schools, only 1 percent of the teachers lack the highly qualified distinction.

New Jersey is also promoting the recruitment of highly qualified teachers, especially in high-poverty districts. "We tell [current teachers] that they should promote their own school district and emphasize the support that it gives to new teachers," says Albritton, who adds that "alternate route" candidates get "pretty intensive training" to help them succeed.

This spring, state officials will start parsing data sent in from all school districts to determine which programs and strategies have been the most effective for helping teachers attain the highly qualified status.



Testing Teacher Candidates

The HQT mandate, in combination with other state-level changes, seems to have already made a difference in the quality of teachers entering the workforce, according to one recent study. Educational Testing Service (ETS), which administers the Praxis Series tests for teacher licensing across the United States, compared the academic profiles of two groups of test takers in 1994–97 and 2002–05. The ETS analysis found the recent group of teacher candidates had stronger undergraduate grades and SAT scores. The study also showed that a higher proportion of candidates are bringing more teaching experience with them through university-based teacher preparation programs. Overall, the quality of teacher candidates has increased across gender, racial and ethnic groups, and various licensing areas.

The report of the study's findings, titled *Teacher Quality in a Changing Policy Landscape: Improvements in the Teacher Pool*, says that the results "bode well for the academic achievement of the nation's K–12 population." The report also states that "Since research has shown that teachers' academic ability is associated with improved student learning, the increases in the academic quality of the teacher pool shown in this study should have a long-term impact on educational achievement."

In a December 9, 2007, *Education Week* article by Bess Keller, some education experts pointed out the ETS report's shortcomings, noting that the most populous states—California, Florida, New York, and Texas—don't use the Praxis test for licensing and are excluded from the data set. Prominent education leaders whom Keller interviewed cautioned against relying on academic records to determine teacher effectiveness. Another researcher also pointed out that the study doesn't show any correlation between teacher entrance examinations and gains in state test scores for their students—another, somewhat narrow, criterion of teacher effectiveness in light of high-stakes testing.

Hiring High-Quality Teachers

Finding degreed and certified teachers is, in many ways, an easier task than determining how *effective* they will be once in the classroom. James Stronge and Jennifer Hindman, authors of the ASCD book and CD *The Teacher Quality Index: A Protocol for Teacher Selection* (2006), explain that determining a teacher's potential effectiveness during the hiring process is difficult because it involves all aspects of a teacher's "background, skills, and dispositions, ranging from personality to knowledge to technical skills."

Pinning down teacher effectiveness is a bit like defining beauty, suggest Stronge and Hindman, because it's "often in the eye of the beholder when

people recall a special teacher." In his book

Qualities of Effective Teachers, 2nd ed.

(ASCD, 2007),

Stronge contends that schools should take measures of quality into account beyond the basic federal guidelines of a college degree or certification in a subject area. Stronge sums

up six areas of teacher effectiveness:

- **Prerequisites of effective teaching:** Does the

teacher also have verbal ability, education coursework, and experience in addition to certification and content knowledge?

- **The teacher as a person:** Does the teacher convey to students an attitude of caring, trust, and respect?

- **Classroom management and organization:** Does the teacher develop clear routines, procedures, and expectations in a positive classroom environment to minimize off-task behavior?

- **Planning for instruction:** Does the teacher demonstrate knowledge in the content area with a vision about what students will need to learn and how they'll get there?

- **Implementing instruction:** Does the teacher use appropriate instructional strategies—individual, group work, and questioning—to promote high expectations and reflective learning among his students?

- **Monitoring student progress and potential:** Does the teacher use a variety of assessments to check for student understanding and tailor instruction to lead students to academic success?

In *The Teacher Quality Index*, Stronge and Hindman used the research on factors of effective teachers to devise a matrix to help hiring administrators move beyond personal perceptions of what constitutes a good teacher.

"What we are really aiming for in teacher selection is *predictive validity*—that is, the ability to use the information available about candidates to make hiring decisions that result in capable and committed teachers," advise Stronge and Hindman. "Unless we do, in fact, hire quality teachers, we all lose as our schools fail and children suffer." ■

—RICK ALLEN

